



U.S. Department of Justice
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NEWS RELEASE

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September 13, 2004

FORMER TREGO COUNTY SHERIFF SENTENCED ON DRUG AND GUN CHARGES.

WICHITA, Kan. – United States Attorney Eric Melgren announced that **Curtis L. Bender**, 37, Lawrence, was sentenced Sept. 13, 2004, by U.S. District Judge Wesley Brown. Bender was sentenced to **123 months in federal prison, without parole, to be followed by five years of supervised release.**

Bender was convicted May 19, 2004, in U.S. District Court in Wichita, Kansas, following a six-day jury trial on one count of conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute cocaine; two counts of distributing cocaine; one count of attempting to distribute cocaine; and one count of unlawfully possessing a firearm in furtherance of a drug trafficking crime.

Melgren stated that according to evidence presented at trial, from March 22, 2003, through March 25, 2003, Bender, while serving as Trego County Sheriff, conspired with others to distribute cocaine in Trego and Ellis County, Kansas. According to trial evidence, the Kansas Bureau of Investigation received a tip in March 2003 that Bender was attempting to sell cocaine. The KBI investigated and set up, through an undercover officer, controlled buys of cocaine on March 22 and March 23, 2003. On March 25, 2003, Bender attempted to distribute approximately 871 grams (approximately 1.92 pounds) of cocaine to an undercover officer and possessed a handgun during this attempted sale. This cocaine was first discovered by an individual who purchased a seized 1994 Dodge Intrepid that had been sold at a sheriff's sale. The cocaine was subsequently discovered in the car, and turned over to Bender, the Trego County Sheriff, for destruction. Bender, rather than destroying the cocaine, kept it and distributed or attempted to distribute it in Trego and Ellis County, Kansas.

Melgren commended the excellent work of the Kansas Bureau of Investigation in this investigation and Assistant U.S. Attorneys Lanny Welch and Mona Furst in this prosecution.